

Funeral of Lance Fennell

[Enter to David Bowie – ‘Everyone Says Hi’]

Introduction

Good afternoon, everyone and welcome. My name is Kim Cumming, and it's a great privilege for me to be here this afternoon to conduct Lance's celebration of life service.

Opening Words

We come together today, to this special place, united in love and sadness at the death of such a kind, genuine and friendly man – Lance – such a talented man....

When a loss such as this cuts across a life in its fullness, we're left with incompleteness. We know that Lance leaves much unfinished, unfulfilled.... that there are still other things you wanted to share with him and so this feeling of being cheated, the sadness for the loss of his life, mingles with the sadness for the loss of possibilities not realized.

We'll all share our overwhelming grief and tears in the coming days, weeks, and months ahead, but we owe it to Lance and everything he means to us to celebrate his life. We shouldn't dwell on his loss but focus on how Lance lived – his personality, individuality, and character.

For Lance, life was all about family and art – that's to be celebrated - and although he's no longer with us we can celebrate the fact that we were privileged and honoured to have known him.

Reading

Despite the difficulty and emotion that today brings, Lances family and friends would like to pay tribute to him in their own way and so firstly, I'd like to invite Lance's daughter **Martha** to read a poem by Kahil Gibran.

You would know the secret of death.

But how shall you find it unless you seek it in the heart of life?

The owl whose night-bound eyes are blind unto the day cannot unveil the mystery of light.

If you would indeed behold the spirit of death, open your heart wide unto the body of life.

For life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one.

In the depth of your hopes and desires lies your silent knowledge of the beyond;

And like seeds dreaming beneath the snow your heart dreams of spring.

Trust the dreams, for in them is hidden the gate to eternity.

Your fear of death is but the trembling of the shepherd when he stands before the king whose hand is to be laid upon him in honour.

Is the shepherd not joyful beneath his trembling, that he shall wear the mark of the king?

Yet is he not more mindful of his trembling?

For what is it to die but to stand naked in the wind and to melt into the sun?

And what is it to cease breathing but to free the breath from its restless tides,

That it may rise and expand and seek God unencumbered?

Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you indeed sing.

And when you have reached the mountain top,

Then you shall begin to climb.

And when the earth shall claim your limbs,

Then shall you truly dance.

And now, Lance's son **Felix** would like to say a few words.....

At the top of Dad's files was a copy of a tweet that says:

Notes to self for the new year:

- 1. Breathe deeply (as often as you can)*
- 2. Slow down (as much as you can)*
- 3. Accept and let go (of whatever you can)*
- 4. Be kind (to everyone you can, including yourself)*
- 5. Forgive yourself when you forget any of the above and begin again*

That was from 2019 but I think it's clear that Dad had been practicing all these things all his life. Whether it was:

- The meditation lessons he gave Martha and I on the way to school*
- Wanting nothing more than to spend his time painting and with those he loved*
- In the incredible bravery, strength and selflessness, he showed during his illness*
- Or in being the kindest, most supportive Father, Husband, Family, Friend, Colleague, or Stranger you could hope to meet.*

He was always there:

- to help move house*
- to bite the head of a marzipan pig*
- to show how the most mundane scene can be beautiful*
- or just to listen and provide comfort*

He taught Martha and I, and I'm sure everyone here, so much about:

- being independent*
- standing up for yourself and others*
- and prioritising what you love*

And now, though he's gone, we'll always see him in art, the moon, summers, long roads and most importantly in each other.

Lance's best friend **Philip** would now like to pay tribute to his closest and dearest friend

As an art student, a tutor once suggested to Lance he submit some paintings for inclusion in a group exhibition. It was not because the tutor thought they might be accepted but because, as he put it, "you need to get used to failure".

It was a brutal truth if trying to get anywhere in the art world. As a boy at Brentwood School, failure had not been on the curriculum. Consequently, through a mixture of left-field ideas, art school, Buddhism and other enthusiasms, he developed an attitude that enabled him to tread the path between convention and non-conformity.

He was the art student who became a book-keeper. The painter of strange pictures who also helped Network Rail manage the removal of leaves on the line. He was a popular workmate and the art teacher with fully booked workshops. He drew people to him. He was good to go to for an opinion. He was good to talk to. He was a good friend. We are all poorer for his passing and my life is lonelier without his friendship.

Lance was fatalistic about the cards that life ultimately dealt him. He did not rage against the dying of the light. He went peacefully into that good night, asleep, his children at his side. He meant something to everyone in the room.

We will each remember him in our own way.

Eulogy by Kim Cumming

Lance Kristian Fennell came into the world in Brentwood Essex on the 10th of June 1963 to parents Leslie and Lisi, one of 3 siblings to Lester and Linda.

Raised in a happy and loving home, he was taught independence, to use your common sense and to make the best use of your day.

He had a childhood spent playing out all day with his best friend Elias and family skiing holidays abroad.... but attending a private school, he didn't like it – being forced to wear a cap, which he tried every which way to wear to show his distaste for, a cheeky chappy who would rebel against arbitration. He once linked arms with school mates, lining the staircase for purpose of protest – just because they could.

But around 13 years old, his art teacher pointed out that he was producing work that other people weren't doing and that comment really made Lance sit up and listen and that is when his interest in art was fired up.

He went on to do an art foundation followed by a degree at Bath Academy, where he met his good friend Philip. His studio being in the gatehouses of Corsham Court. He really enjoyed landscapes and most mornings he'd venture out with his box of paints and easel and set up in a field. He had this system where he'd pick up a stick, throw it in the air and paint whatever scene it pointed to!

Lance's mum was a freelance bookkeeper and teaching Lance in bookkeeping, got him a job at a nearby electrical wholesaler when he art school and later went to do bookkeeping for the Bank-side Gallery in London, which is next to what became the Tate modern. He was back in the art world albeit as a bookkeeper.

Meeting his future wife Sara in Brentwood, he joined the local choir to be spend time with her as she was already a member and going on to marry in the late 1980s, they moved to Chiswick and then to Water Stratford, where they were just thrilled to welcome a son into the world – Felix, followed by a daughter, Martha, making their family complete.

He later started up his own bookkeeping business - Frontline – named after the animal flea jabs of all things – setting up a small office in his back garden before moving into an office in Buckingham.

Lance's art was a passion - work was something he did to support it, and he became so disciplined with his time, ensuring dedicated time was put aside to continue his art whenever he could.

So, a few years later his marriage to Sara would end and Lance to moved to Winslow. He began working with the FDI, for dentists as head of finance in Geneva, but he never let that distance interfere with seeing his children – it was tiring commuting back and forth, but it was worth it to spend quality time with Felix and Martha....and they both have such fond and happy memories of those times. Felix remembering how his dad would read *The Hobbit* to him and both remembering strongly being told to go to bed by Dad wielding a garden flame-thrower.

They enjoyed several memorable holidays to Portugal – including with their late grandmother.

Both recall his huge eclectic record collection from Bob Dylan to Britney Spears – dad was always playing his music – Martha remembering how he was singing to Bowie just a few short weeks ago.

They were both fussy eaters as children and he worked out chicken dippers were their favourite so whilst mum was feeding them good nutritional balanced meals – they always looked forward to their chicken dippers with dad, and the subsequent packed lunches he sent them to school with, filled with Penguins and Nutella.

Lance definitely passed on his creativity to both his children – who he was always both impressed with and proud - Martha now an art teacher herself and recalling the day she spent painting with oil with her dad whilst doing her A-levels.

And as a dad, his children say he taught them to speak up, don't just roll over – along with manners and respect.

But love was to find Lance again, when he met Tracey and building a life together, they moved in together in Milton Keynes and going on to marry, Lance became step-dad to Tracey's 3 children – Jessie, Lorna and Matthew.

With 5 children between them, all the children pretty much grew up with each other. It was a hectic few early years but a great family time, with holidays to France and Spain – Felix and Martha remembering the 7 seater van they travelled in, the electric hand break and those scary trips over the treacherous mountains, the 3 point turn on no more than a ledge - which all the children found great fun, but Lance not so much, with some colourful language I understand. It was also on one of these trips that Lance found Felix had carved his name on the outside dining table – a few more choice words no doubt. Martha recalling how she and Jessie shared a room on one trip and all the spiders in the doorway of their room – they weren't happy. They all share a close relationship to this day.

Lance went on to get a studio at The Westbury Art Centre in Shenley Wood - a house full of artists who often sit around the table in the kitchen (pre covid) and talk about art and artists or about materials and techniques – with Lance entering into teaching, taking classes and workshops - it was a very special place to Lance, his sanctuary.

In his working life, Lance remained in financial roles until joining Network Rail, where he remained for the last 13 years as a business manager - and he loved it there. A colleague remembered for his love of poetry and his wagons. Friday afternoons even became known for Lance to give a recital – his colleagues asking him to read – Lance never assuming they wanted to hear him.

I know some of his friends and colleagues from both Westbury Art Centre and Network Rail are here today - I know he'll be so sorely missed, and he'd be so touched to see you all here.

Setting up home in Rugby more recently on his own, of course he had a dedicated art room for his art - he'd had to give up his studio at Westbury, but he was still organising and teaching there.

So creative, he'd tried his hand at mural painting when he first left university – one can still be seen in his own dad's home in Pinner.

Lance had such a range and over the years, trying many different styles using stained glass – even encasing the Children's McDonalds toys in resin – his work focusing on townscapes, landscapes, in fact, anything outdoors – even developing a unique frame art - he never ran out of ideas.

Art was his way of expressing himself, touching on some of his own hopes and fears with the way he thought the world is going – his work exhibited at the Royal Academy Summer Show, not once but twice!

Lance loved culture, art, and poetry – particularly Omar Khayyam and referring to the paintings in the National gallery as old friends. I'm sure he introduced many of you to different artists, poets & music artists, especially Dylan!

Described as a robust character with a good sense of humour, he was independent, practical and always happy to say his piece. I know he wrote to his MP several times to give him a piece of his mind.

A good man to go to for advice though, he was realistic and known for telling you how hard work pays off.....and a man of principle, he would always tell you - 'don't buy from Amazon or Starbucks – they don't pay their taxes'!

He had what some might consider a passion for using Excel, enjoying the creativity of writing a really good formula, saying it was almost like painting a really good picture.

And there were times he had his moments of mischief. Apparently, he missed one of his A levels, skipping out to go to Glastonbury instead.

Remembered by his family for his deep baritone voice, his big hugs, his silly jokes, the way he didn't care about what he looked like, he was simply Lance.....dad.

Persuasive - some would say persistent at Network Rail -Lance was a direct and open kind of man but was good with people, he loved a chat – enjoying his own time and space as much as he did being in the company of others.

Lance, undoubtedly, was taken from us far too soon. We've lost a good man, one who was pragmatic and stoic in the worst of times during his illness - just simply saying 'it is what it is' and accepting the situation he found himself in.

His loss leaves a void in the lives of those closest to him, but his burning light will stay bright in the hearts and minds of all those who know and love him - his memory cherished now and always.

Moment of Reflection

For our quiet reflection – in Lance's own words.....

At first, listen. This song is Bob missing his woman—nothing new there-but it's also the best description of what's it's been like to be alive for me.

Of course, some of the time it's not been like that, and my head wasn't on straight. That's Bob's genius for you, letting you work it out and fill in the gaps....and because this is one of a couple of versions that show how the song developed before the "final" cut on Oh Mercy. Seeing and hearing his creative process meant so much to me.

Committal

Family and friends, the time has come to say our farewell to Lance. If you are able, can I ask you please to stand.

Tenderly, lovingly, and reverently, as we say our last goodbye to Lance, we say to him.....

We rejoice that you lived.

We give thanks for your love and the joy you brought.

You leave lasting, loving memories of your life with us all

With love we leave you in peace.

With respect we bid you farewell.

Net Curtain to Close

Closing Words

As an artist, Lance saw the beauty of the world that many of us miss, because we're in such a rush all the time. He made time for what he loved – art and family. He knew just how precious life is. Aside from his beautiful paintings and drawings, Lance leaves a valuable legacy - make time for your interests, explore them, stand still for a moment, and take life in, in all its glory. You have to concentrate on what gives you joy.

Lance's life was one of purpose, success, love, and friendship so remember him with joy.

He'll never truly be gone - he leaves his amazing art and in turn, a piece of himself with all of you.

On behalf of Lances family, I'd like to thank you all for being here today. They'd like to invite you all to Westbury Arts Centre after our service, to share some refreshments and, I'm sure, many more memories of Lance with each other.

And they've chosen Myton Hospice in Rugby for donations in Lance's memory, so if you'd like to donate, there will be a collection box in the flower courtyard after we leave the chapel.

Music and Exit

But now, as take our leave from here and to help send us on our way, we'll listen to a favourite track of Lances – The River Man by Nick Drake. Thank you.

[Exit to Nick Drake – 'The River Man']